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ABSTRACT

This paper claims that transfer is increasing in popularity among community college students due to a re-emphasis of importance by community college administrators, more convenient transfer policies and procedures, and beneficial credit transfer. Research for this position was conducted at Tulsa Community College (Oklahoma). The research included yearly enrollment and graduate reports produced by the college and a survey of undergraduate students attending a four-year university in Oklahoma. The literature obtained for this study concludes that the transfer function is not perfect, but remains important for students wishing to pursue their education past the community college level. The statistics show increased interest and success with transferring students, and the efforts made by administrators encourage students to take advantage of the transfer function. The original purpose of the transfer function at the community college level has remained the same. The desire for students to attain their lower level collegiate education in order to pursue studies at a senior institution will always be present in higher education. Overall, the study concluded that the transfer function continues to be important and valuable. Its presence as a convenient means of pursuing a higher education beyond the community college level allows students the chance to earn baccalaureate degrees. (Contains 10 references.) (VWC)

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THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRANSFER FUNCTION:

A STUDY OF ITS SUCCESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE FOR POSITION

Community colleges serve many functions, and the function of transfer has long been an important component of community colleges. History shows that the intent of community colleges included taking students from secondary schools, providing them with an education of introductory collegiate studies and finally sending them to senior institutions for their baccalaureate. Since the inception of community colleges and the transfer function, transfer procedures have endured negative and positive influences. Negative influences include incomplete transfer students' transcripts and the increase of job enhancing courses for students wishing to advance job skills only, which prevents them from transferring to senior institutions. Some positive influences include the rising rates of students taking advantage of the transfer function due to improved transfer procedures and the development of departments, which focus on student progress from community colleges to universities.

This paper takes a position, which claims that the transfer function is increasing in utilization by community college students due to a re-emphasis of importance by community college administrators, more convenient transfer policies and procedures, and beneficial credit transfers. Research for this position was conducted at Tulsa Community College in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The research included yearly enrollment and graduate reports produced by the college and a survey of undergraduate students attending a four-year university in Oklahoma. Though the paper intended to study transfer rates in the English Department of Tulsa Community College, more relevancy was found in analyzing Tulsa Community College as a whole.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Community colleges are obligated to serve their students in a multitude of functions. Though the vocational-technical function, community education function, and remedial education function mirrors the importance of the transfer function, administrators are beginning to concentrate on the success of students who transfer in order to enhance their education. Analyzing statistics of transfer students who transfer from community colleges to universities, and understanding the administrators' goal of improving transfer procedures and policies make the transfer function a positive aspect of community colleges.

Analyzing the rates of community college transfer students to four-year universities identifies the gradual increase of the transfer function's existence. The number of transfer students to four-year universities hasn't always been positive. Cohen (1989) states that in the 1950's two-thirds of community college students sought transfer, whereas in the 1980's only one-third of these students sought transfer (p. 1). This number shows a decline in the transfer function; however, today, the transfer rate is again increasing. In 1998 a study showed that almost 64 percent of juniors and seniors who attended Arizona State University possessed transfer hours from community colleges. Also, in this same study at the University of Maryland half of the engineering students began their studies at community colleges (Chenoweth, p. 24).

A 1995 article in Change identifies the characteristics of transfer students. This research shows that transfer students are both male and female and make up a variety of ethnic groups. Also, transfer students tend to have higher grades than non-transfer students. In a private non-secretarian university studied, only 9 percent of the students

transferred from community colleges; however 88 percent of these students maintained a 3.0 GPA. In comparison to the private university studied, a public university showed that 16 percent of the student population were community college transfers, and 52 percent of these students maintained a 3.0 GPA (p. 39).

The attempt to improve transfer procedures and policies has developed due to an increasingly complicated transfer process for students. Tobolowsky states that the transfer function has lost its simple procedure that included students moving from high school to junior colleges to the university in an easy vertical progression (1998, p. 1). The lack of communication between community colleges and universities and the absence of departments and programs that would assist students in transferring deter students from taking advantage of the transfer function. Another big hindrance for students involves transfer students' transcripts, which are incomplete and organized in a complicated fashion. These students complain that once they transfer from the community college, their transcript is void of courses taken and credits earned. This forces students to re-take costly classes that are unnecessarily needed, making the transition into universities frustrating (Tobolowsky, p. 2).

Ways in which to improve the transfer function are becoming the priority of school administrators. In Cohen's (1989) article "Commitment to Transfer" several ideas that would make transferring easier include enforcing course prerequisites, monitoring student progress, and providing information for transfer opportunities (p. 2). Other solutions include schools implementing centralized student databases that would monitor student progress and devising a common course numbering system in order to ensure that

a transcript doesn't have to be reviewed separately (p. 3). These ideas can potentially make transferring a more convenient and beneficial process for students.

Once administrators devise ideas for improving the transfer function, several proposals are put into action. Cohen adds that in 1987 eleven states were making money available to colleges in order to enhance different transfer-directed activities. Some states that have focused on improving the transfer function include Colorado, Michigan and California. Both Colorado and Michigan have mandated communication procedures between community colleges and universities that would ensure students' convenience in transferring to four-year universities (p. 2). California, which has one of the best community college student transfer rates, has made the most efforts in increasing transfer statistics. Stephens states in her article, "University of California Aims to Raise Transfer Rates by 38 Percent," that in November 1998 the university pledged to increase the number of transfers from community colleges to 14,500 by the year 2005. This number would be an amazing 38 percent jump from the 1997 transfer rate (1998, p. 16). These positive examples of schools trying to improve student transfer rates are encouraging many other schools to implement plans and raise money for the transfer function.

The transfer function of community colleges is an important role in higher education. Analyzing the student transfer rates from community colleges to universities and highlighting the strides taken by school officials to improve the transfer process encourages understanding of this important and beneficial function of higher education.

MINI-FIELD STUDY OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Researching the increasing number of community college student transfers meant analyzing data obtained by Tulsa Community College, Institutional Services Department, in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The Tulsa Community College Catalog for 2000-2001 highlights the college's commitment to the transfer function. The college offers over 70 programs that are designed to transfer to senior institutions, and once a student attains the 37 total credit hours for general education requirements the transition into a university is almost guaranteed. This commitment is encouraged by the articulation agreement, which states that all state-supported universities in the state of Oklahoma recognize credits earned by students at Tulsa Community College.

Because Tulsa Community College is the largest two-year college in Oklahoma and roughly 65 percent of students in the Tulsa County began their higher education studies at Tulsa Community College, it continues to encourage and improve its transfer function. The Tulsa Community College website states,

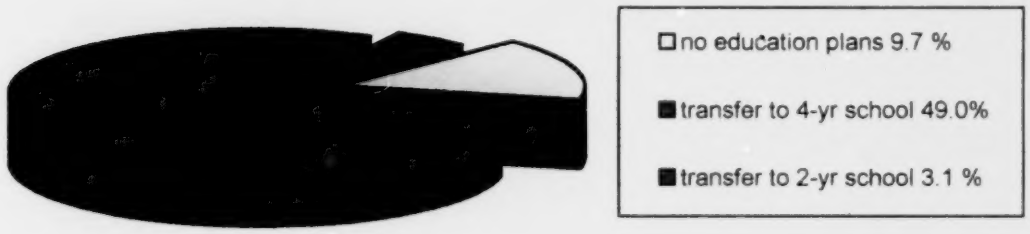
> "The mission of Tulsa Community College as defined by the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education is to [provide] education in several basic fields of university parallel study for those students who plan to transfer to a senior institution and complete a bachelors degree" (Tulsa p. 1).

Once the foundation for the transfer function at Tulsa Community College is in place, analyzing statistics that focus on the success of student transfers become important for understanding the college's dedication to the transfer function. The study 1997-1998 Graduate Survey Summary of Results reports that close to 50 percent of Tulsa Community College graduates transferred to four-year universities in the state of

Oklahoma. This number far exceeds the numbers of students who transferred to two-year institutions in Oklahoma and those who didn't continue their education. The percentages for this study are listed in Figure 1.

Figure 1

PERCENTAGES FOR STUDENTS' PLANS FOLLOWING GRADUATION FROM TULSA COMMUNITY COLLEGE



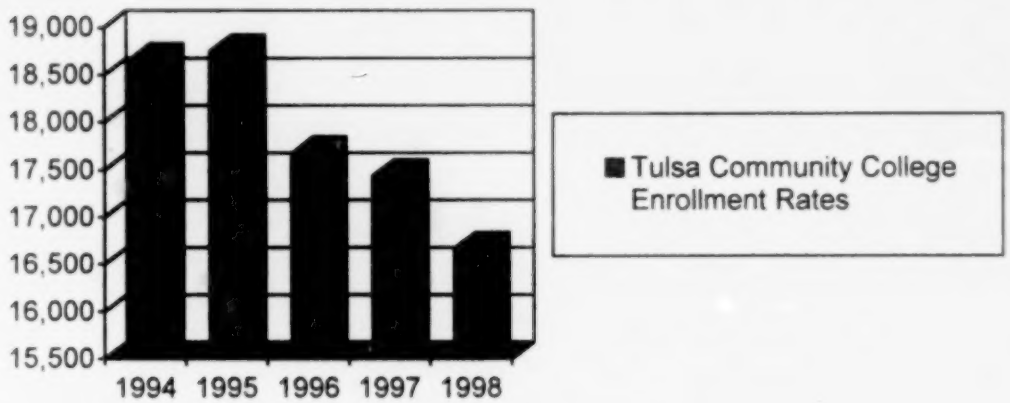
Another Tulsa Community College study illustrates the high number of students who majored in a university parallel program in 1997. This study, Report of Students Enrolled Fall 1998 states that 60 percent of students majored in university parallel programs, making this percentage thirteen points higher than in 1994. English is included in the university parallel program, and though this study veers away from focusing solely on the English Department at Tulsa Community College, a 1998 study called Report of Student Enrollment By Major for Academic Year 1998 shows that 138 students chose and pursued an English major. This statistic illustrates that the number of students entering university parallel programs is high. The increase indicates a continued interest in programs that are transferable to universities.

A survey of undergraduate students at a local four-year university proves the positive utilization of the transfer function by community college students. A survey of 21 students attending Oklahoma State University in Tulsa concludes that out of the students surveyed 15 attended Tulsa Community College prior to their enrollment at OSU-Tulsa. These students possess a variety of majors such as English, Electrical Engineering, Dietetics, Computer Science and Special Education. These students stated that their Tulsa Community College education was a pleasant experience and found their decision to begin at the community college beneficial.

An important factor in determining student transfer rates includes analyzing the enrollment statistics for Tulsa Community College. The enrollment rates for the college have remained rather steady since 1994, dipping only slightly in 1998 as reported by the study Report of Students Enrolled Fall 1998. Some reasons for this recent enrollment decrease are located in the report Non-Returning Student Survey Results Fall 1997 to Spring 1998. This study states that 11.5 percent of non-returning Tulsa Community College students transferred to alternate universities or colleges, 11.5 percent of the students chose not to return due to family obligations, and 16.4 percent of these previous students believed their educational goals had been fulfilled. Though this study investigated non-returning students' reason for leaving the college, overall the enrollment rates are encouraging, and these numbers will continue to grow as students take advantage of the transfer function at the community college level prior to advancing their studies to four-year universities. A complete analysis of Tulsa Community College enrollment trends from 1994 to 1998 is located in Figure 2.

Figure 2

TULSA COMMUNITY COLLEGE ENROLLMENT TRENDS FOR 1994-1998



The transfer function is an important factor at Tulsa Community College. After analyzing the data regarding transfer rates for Tulsa Community College, research shows an increased interest in the transfer function among students. This interest is likely to increase as continued emphasis is placed on the importance of the transfer function.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The literature obtained for this study concludes that the transfer function is not perfect, but remains important for students wishing to pursue their education past the community college level. The statistics show increased interest and success with transferring students, and the efforts made by administrators encourage students to take advantage of the transfer function. The original purpose of the transfer function at the community college level has remained the same. The desire for students to attain their lower level collegiate education in order to pursue studies at a senior institution will always be present in higher education. The opportunity to mature before attending a university, attain the general education requirements, and perhaps focus on a major

makes the transition from a community college to a university more practical and beneficial to students.

This study took the position that the transfer function is increasing in popularity, and the research finds this position supported. Though there are always some negative and positive in regards to research, overall the study concluded that the transfer function continues to be important and valuable. Its presence as a convenient means of pursuing a higher education beyond the community college level, allows students the chance to earn baccalaureate degrees. Attaining degrees from four-year universities are beneficial as stated by Barbara Tobolowsky's article, "Improving Transfer and Articulation Policies." The article states, "Today, it is clear that a bachelor's degree is essential for success in many careers, and a key aspect of community college mission continues to be to provide courses for transfer toward a baccalaureate degree" (1998, p. 2).

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